

# Humanitarian Aid and Welfare Services Basics: How Donations and Resources Are Used

When the multimillion-dollar Teton Dam disaster struck Idaho in 1976, a force of 45,000 Latter-day Saints was deployed almost overnight to provide emergency relief. When Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, Mormon relief trucks arrived before the National Guard was even allowing relief through. Massive oil spills in South Korea in late 2007 found hundreds of volunteers handling the disaster with plans, supplies and manpower within days. The 2010 Haitian earthquake catastrophe was met immediately with 160,000 pounds of food and emergency resources, and a month later, when a devastating earthquake hit Chile, an airlift of tents, tarps, supplies and even diapers was quickly deployed.

The Church is interested in helping those in need become self-sufficient in the long term as well as meeting immediate needs. After the 2004 tsunami devastated Southeast Asia, [LDS Humanitarian Services personnel were still working](#) with community-based organizations to provide longer-term aid and development three years later. In addition, the Church regularly donates wheelchairs, funds global immunization efforts, provides clean water service, trains doctors and volunteers in neonatal resuscitation programs, and offers training and treatment for preventing blindness for people all over the world, regardless of race, religion or nationality.

While the Church's humanitarian aid efforts and its significant financial donations may be known to some, few realize that they represent only a fraction of the costs and resources involved with carrying out these initiatives. Furthermore, it may not be well known that the Church sponsors many other relief programs, including extensive welfare, vocational, rehabilitative, counseling and other services. These services include millions of hours donated by Latter-day Saint doctors, nurses and other Church members each year. Thousands of professionals and volunteers give freely of their time and means to those in need, with no expectation of praise, publicity or reward.

While 100 percent of fast offerings and humanitarian donations go directly to those in need, the overhead and administrative costs associated with these programs — in addition to the resources needed to build storage facilities, house and deliver humanitarian aid supplies around the world, train volunteers and so on — are privately fronted by the Church. Today, thanks to a robust infrastructure, the Church continues to relieve the hunger, thirst, suffering and poverty of millions of people around the world and to empower individuals and communities to become more self-sustaining.

## **Why We Give**

As disciples of Jesus Christ, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints endeavor to follow the Savior's admonition to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, take in the stranger,

clothe the naked and visit the sick and those in prison (see [Matthew 25:35–36](#) and the [2011 Welfare Services Fact Sheet](#)). Through the efforts of individuals, families and Church programs, temporal and spiritual assistance has been given to millions in need.

A recent study sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Policy and Practice focused on the charitable donations and volunteerism of active Latter-day Saints in the United States. Professor Ram Cnaan and a team of researchers analyzed survey data from a large sample of church-attending Latter-day Saints living throughout the country. Based on their findings, the authors concluded that active Latter-day Saints "volunteer and donate significantly more" than the national average. "Regardless of where they live, they are very generous with their time and money," Cnaan, an expert in faith-based social services and the lead researcher, said. "Through a theology of obedience and sacrifice and a strong commitment to tithing and service, Latter-day Saints are model citizens" (see stories about Cnaan's study on [MormonNewsroom.org](#) and [Penn News](#)).

### **Breakdown of Donations and Resources**

The following are some of the ways in which Latter-day Saint resources and donations are used:

#### **Tithing**

In keeping with the biblical practice of tithes, Latter-day Saints offer one-tenth of their income to the Church. These funds are used for:

- Providing buildings or places of worship for members around the world. We have thousands of such buildings and continue to open more, sometimes several in a week.
- Providing education programs, including support for our universities and our seminary and institute programs.
- Supporting the Church's worldwide missionary program.
- Building and operating more than 140 temples around the world and the administration of the world's largest family history program.
- Supporting the Church's welfare programs and humanitarian aid, which serve people around the world — both members of the Church as well as those who are not members.

#### **Fast Offerings**

On the first Sunday of the month, healthy members of the Church are encouraged to fast for two consecutive meals and donate to the Church the money they would have spent on food. These funds help those in local congregations, where Mormon leaders confidentially allocate funds to the needy, with the ultimate goal being eventual self-reliance.

#### **Humanitarian Aid**

The Church has joined in more than 200 major disaster assistance efforts, including the 2011 Japan earthquake and tsunami, the 2010 Haiti earthquake, the 2010 Chile earthquake, the 2010 Pakistan flooding, the 2009 Samoa tsunami, the 2009 Philippines typhoon, the 2009 Indonesia earthquake, the 2008 Ethiopia famine and many others. Naturally, the Church undertakes these projects without regard to the nationality or religion of the recipients.

When a disaster strikes, Latter-day Saints work with local government officials to determine what supplies and food are needed. Materials are then purchased or assembled locally or shipped from Latter-day Saint storehouses. After urgent needs are met, the Church looks for additional ways to aid in long-term efforts. Our approach is always to help people become self-reliant by teaching skills and providing resources for a self-sustained life.

All of these efforts are made possible by the generous donations of Latter-day Saints and many other charitable individuals and organizations. One hundred percent of the donations given to the Church's Humanitarian Services support the Church's mission to help those in need; the Church absorbs all of its own overhead and administrative costs.

While the Church's [emergency response](#) to major disasters draws more media attention, Latter-day Saints engage in six other initiatives. These include:

- [Neonatal resuscitation training](#): providing resuscitation training and equipment to health practitioners and organizations each year in countries with high infant mortality rates.
- [Clean water](#): working with local community leaders to provide access to clean water with wells and other water systems in countries where such access is unavailable.
- [Food production and nutrition](#): providing training to families and communities to increase productivity and self-sufficiency with home food production and nutrition training.
- [Wheelchairs](#): working in partnership with local organizations to provide wheelchairs to the disabled.
- [Vision care](#): providing equipment and training to local, qualified medical personnel to perform eye surgeries and prevent blindness.
- [Immunizations](#): partnering with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to provide immunizations and vaccinations for measles, whooping cough and other conditions.

These programs rely not just on donations but also on the time, efforts, expertise and resources of countless volunteers to provide the training and manpower to maintain these services.

### **Welfare Program**

While humanitarian relief is directed to global communities and individuals not of our faith, Latter-day Saints also contribute to the welfare program, which is primarily designed to care for the needy within the stewardship of the Church, though, at the discretion of bishops, local funds can, where possible, assist others in need who are not of our faith. These services operate on principles that encourage self-reliance and self-respect. For example, recipients of these resources are given the opportunity to work — to the extent of their ability — for the assistance they receive or to pay forward the service rendered in other ways. Overhead costs are provided through other funding sources.

Members' donations make possible the programs and resources for self-reliance, relief and emergency services. In addition to meeting the need for food, clothing and shelter, these include providing vocational rehabilitation and employment opportunities for citizens, immigrants and refugees and funding counseling and adoption services as well as addiction recovery support groups and resources for social, emotional and spiritual challenges.

Individuals typically depend on the Church's food assistance for only three to six months before they become self-sufficient once again.

In 2011 there were almost 10,000 volunteer missionaries serving in welfare services, providing services such as managing employment centers, teaching English as a second language, teaching marriage and parenting skills, improving agricultural and medical practices and distributing clothing. (See the [2011 Welfare Services Fact Sheet](#) for more information.)

[Wall Street Journal columnist Naomi Schaefer Riley](#) observed that the LDS welfare system “lets almost no one fall through the cracks while at the same time ensuring that its beneficiaries don’t become lifelong dependents.”

### **Perpetual Education Fund**

Donations to the Perpetual Education Fund support Latter-day Saints in some countries outside the United States in their efforts to acquire technical, vocational or professional education. Loans are granted at minimal interest, and participants do their best to repay the loan as soon as possible to become free of debt and to make money available for others who need help. Repayments from existing participants and donations are used to make new loans to qualified students. The entire administrative cost of the PEF program is borne by the Church, leaving 100 percent of the donations to go directly toward the loans. Over 56,000 students have been helped by these loans, with a 90 percent “pay forward” rate.

### **LDS Family Services**

LDS Family Services draws on charitable donations to offer [counseling services](#) related to addiction recovery, familial conflict resolution, abuse and other issues for individuals, couples and families at a cost based on a family’s ability to pay. They also help fund complete [adoption](#) services for members and provide services to birth parents and families (regardless of faith). Donations assist those unable to completely self-finance the services.

### **Mormon Helping Hands**

The Church also sponsors the [Mormon Helping Hands](#) program, which brings together members of the Church and their neighbors to provide community service all around the world. In recognizable yellow shirts, these volunteers help people whose lives have been affected by disasters or other emergencies. Volunteers also partner with government and nonprofit organizations to support and improve the communities where they live; they clean parks, restore public structures and perform various other community services. Originally started in South America, the program has since spread to nearly every corner of the earth. Hundreds of thousands of Latter-day Saints and other volunteers have donated millions of hours of service to their communities through this program.

### **Time**

Of course, not all donations can be measured monetarily. Time is a precious resource, and Latter-day Saints give it generously. According to the data in the [Penn study](#), an active Latter-day Saint volunteers 427.9 hours annually to charitable causes (35.6 hours per month — 57 percent of which is for religious purposes). They spend an average of 150 hours annually serving in the Church's social and community initiatives, such as the Church's worldwide welfare and humanitarian aid programs. The study reported that individual members give an additional 34 hours annually to other social causes unrelated to the Church. In 2011, almost seven million hours of labor were donated to Church welfare facilities alone.

### ***Other Donations***

Latter-day Saints strive to follow the scriptural counsel to be “anxiously engaged in a good cause.” An abundance of good causes can be found outside Church-sponsored programs, and members are encouraged to be generous with their time and resources in every way they can. According to the [Penn study](#), an active Latter-day Saint donates generously to non-Church-related charitable causes.

### ***Striving for Good Works***

The success of the Church’s welfare program is a credit to the individual Latter-day Saint congregants and their neighbors who voluntarily give of their money and time and support those in need. The total amount of aid given through these efforts is not publicized, but it would be significant by any measure. As multiple independent studies have demonstrated, there is little question that practicing Latter-day Saints are generous with their time and resources. At their best, Latter-day Saints give not for the accolades of others but because they follow the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who taught us to love and serve one another. The Church is mindful of Christ’s admonition to “do not your alms before men, to be seen of them.” At the same time, it takes seriously the Savior’s call to “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” [The Church’s relief efforts strive for this balance.](#)

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**STYLE GUIDE NOTE:**When reporting about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, please use the complete name of the Church in the first reference. For more information on the use of the name of the Church, go to our online [Style Guide](#).